

JUNE 23, 1983

Winter is losing its grip on the Shortgrass Country. The best sign, besides the green pickings along the roadways, is the softening in feed prices. A few short weeks ago, millers were putting outlandish figures on sacked goods. The tighter the dry corner became, the more the market went up. June showers, however, disbanded the feed hustler gang. It was a great relief for all herders to know that they weren't going to be auctioned off for the price of a hundred pounds of milo or a ton of cottonseed meal.

We still have one pasture of Angus cows that collapse at the sound or sight of a pickup. They are about three weeks from setting a new world's record for the free style consumption of cottonseed meal products. Since last November they've consumed so much meal that their eyes are the color of victims of yellow jaundice. Their odor is so close to that of a feed store that I've been looking for the other cattle to try to break through their fence lines.

At this writing we are getting more rain. Here at my office in Mertzon, the outside gauge shows 4 inches and the floor has seeped in a full .8 inches. Up the house, my television room is getting .4 an hour from a leak in the skylight. My neighbor Goat Whiskers has continued to cover the ranch. From the way his reports sound, we are going to mop out more water from the office floor than we are going to get on the rangeland.

The Goat Whiskers outfit has been carrying its share of the dry grief. Last Thursday I used his shipping pens to send off a few calves in a steady mist. We were out two or three hours without ever getting the backs of our shirts or the skirts of our saddle wet. I watched it come a dry rain like that back in the big drouth of the '50s that ran the draws without ever making one mud clod. I can't explain dry rains, but I'll tell you for sure once you start getting them you'd better take a double wrap on your seat belt, because it takes quite a rider to see them out,

Another thing that's happened during this drouth is that the humps of our Brangus cattle are shrinking. Late the other afternoon at the ranch I was sitting out in the backyard watching a couple of hard case sisters grazing up close to the fence, and I couldn't believe how straight their necklines had become.

By using the clothes line as a level, I estimated that six or more inches of arch was gone. After I got to studying them, I remembered reading that camels do that over in Africa after they've been overworked and underfed. So the camel book said, dromedaries really got pulled out of shape without an auxiliary hump to take part of the pressure. I sure couldn't vouch for these quitters of mine being overworked, but the past spring had been hard on their diets.

Hombres that are serious about Brangus cattle have been studying performing hump uplifts to improve the delicate underpinning on their bulls. I sure favor that approach. Nearly anything connected to our business works better if we can get on the wrong side of the problem and work in what looks like the opposite course to correct the situation. The possibilities are unlimited once the vet is located to do the operation. Just like their human master, a few stomach tucks thrown in with the hump work could create a more smooth barreled cow.

It's going to take more than a Christmas calendar for me to forget that \$200 per ton trick the feed dealers had going for them. I think the drouth is turned around for good. It was hard to watch all that rain go out of this office behind a big mop. It would be just our luck for a spring to break out under the wall, but even if it does it'll be dry enough to work at the ranch.